The Story of the Catacombs

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THE STORY OF THE CATACOMBS

The Appian Way.

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FLORENCE EDYTHE BLAKE-HEDGES

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To

MOLLIE BYER KELLER,

whose companionship and aid
in collecting data helped
make possible this
little volume.

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INTRODUCTION

" Were not the eye itself a sun,
No sun for it would ever shine:
By nothing godlike could the heart be won,
Were not the heart of man divine."

THE mystery involved within a miracle has ever appealed to mankind. It comes from the divine, and directly appeals to the divine as found in the human. The greatest mystery of miracle ever brought within the cycle of time was not the marvelous advent of the Lord Christ Himself, here, but the rapid propagation of the mighty force He set moving. Here was a religion set up by an humble, unpretentious worker amid a multitude of doctrines old as man was old; amid creeds sheltered and nourished by the powers of State and shaped by human philosophies, such as man has not reasoned out since; amid creeds that

promised temporal gain and answered the demands of the æsthetic or appealed to the lusts of the flesh. Creeds! The world was full of creeds, and yet here came another, whose perpetrator was born into a carpenter's family, and meekly walked and talked back and forth over a little bit of territory, until it all ended one dark day on Calvary's cross in deepest ignominy. All ended—but for three days—and then the Creator's highest effort, the miracle of the *resurrection,* was wrought, its radiant hope in strangest contrast to the misery of despair dying on the hill crest. In such as this creed all the belief, all the thought of the age was contradicted by this "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Amidst the glory of many gods there was set up the Luminate One, whose penetrating rays filled earth's remotest corners and shone across the path of all humanity, until the onward rushing train of civilization struck the tunnel of the Dark Ages. Had this con-

stellar Sun forever set in the black night of those centuries? Even all that its brilliance had brought forth seemed swallowed up and forgotten. A hollow form of old worship was retained, and not everywhere was the faint cry heard for "Licht, mehr Licht!" But miracles never cease, for suddenly that long dark tunnel ended in the glory of Sunshine flooding all the valleys and the mountain tops of old earth, and the miracle of Christianity was fulfilled unto all time to come.

It was only a little while after the tragedy of the Tomb had been averted that unconscious witnesses left behind them proof that can not be denied or stamped out, however much the dubious ones may choose to discard sacred history. Pliny writes that the Governor of Bithynia *complained* to Trajan that persons of every age and both sexes embraced the pernicious faith. Tertullian boasted that in the second century in Carthage one-tenth of the population

were Christians, including the senatorial rank. The cumulative power and the quickening spread of Christianity seem nothing short of miraculous when we consider the heathen world, at that moment in its worst condition, giving birth to such an active body, to be nursed by apostles who went out as "Lambs among wolves." In the language of an historian, "The heart of the Roman Empire under the Cæsars was a cesspool of stagnant waters. . . . Reduced as it was to torpor, under the nightmare of an absolutism which it neither could or would shake off, the Roman world sought its solace in superstition, in sensuality, or in stoicism. The chill and death from these was reflected in all." The reason for this miracle of Christianity? It is found only in the divine. The heart of man was won by the Godlike as one innovating power after another expanded and took root. One of the last commands that issued from the cross, "Behold thy mother!" (John xix, 27)

has had especial significance in the evangelization of the world, for it meant so much to the women, especially those of the East. Man must now have especial care over womankind, marriage was sanctified as never before, and a wife's common faith and common hope, with that of her husband, raised her to an equality of sex.

The Christian religion planted its mightiest buttress in the home, for the nations are builded with that unit. Each Christian home is an evidence of that miracle, and side by side with this daily evidence stands that mighty testimony of its earliest achievements, the SCRIPTURES, the CHURCH, and the CATACOMBS at Rome.

"A TOAST TO THE ARCHÆOLOGIST"

TO the patient, careful archæologist the world owes its correction of false notions as to supposed customs, erroneous chronology, and unknown life. Archæology, instead of being dead and dry as some would suppose, is of most vital interest for its vital connection with the past; scientists will describe the inhabitants and environments of some far-off age from the single bone of an animal, so the archæologist will give us the story of lives, manners, and customs from his little store of relics. The rather recent unearthing of Pithom (Ex. i, 11), the remains of Stonehenge, or the relics of the Catacombs, are all unconscious witnesses to the facts of history, sacred or profane. As one has said: "Christian writings might be forgeries, or they might be interpolated, but Christian

monuments could not well be either. Christianity, therefore, has no more anomalies, contradictions, or impossibilities than nature itself has; it is rather a higher law of God, of which nature is but the symbol." So in this present day of manifold ideas and customs, when even the Church of Christ is rioting in division of dogmas and creeds, it is with more than usual interest we turn to the evidences of the first Christian centuries, and inquire into the customs and beliefs of the ancient Church before it was controlled by governmental powers. Who was this Jesus of Nazareth, and what His truths of such absolute authority established by His immediate followers in the primitive Church? Slight investigation will prove that although the Roman Church has been suffered to claim identity in discipline and doctrine with that evidenced in the early Church, yet there is more striking similarity between those practices of the early apostles and that of our Reformed or Protestant faith.

THE STORY OF THE CATACOMBS

A PROCESSION ALONG THE APPIAN WAY

CONQUERING heroes loved that road; the Roman citizens loved it; representatives of all nations, barbaric or civilized, seeing it for the first time as they approached the "Mistress of the World," looked upon it in wonder, envy, and admiration. Slaves were delighted if the train of master or mistress led thither, for the Appian Way was queen of roads. Three hundred and twelve years before the star of Bethlehem appeared this road had been laid down, with paving stones stretching like a ribbon from the city gates, far across the Campagna, away over the mountains, and down to the southern shores of Latium, all at the instigation of that illustrious patrician Sabine, Appius Claudius the Blind. To-day the world-famed Via

Appia is still the most celebrated road leading out of Rome, the most interesting in Pagan and Christian history.

Many noble processions have trod its hard, smooth bed, and perchance in years to come some famous march, as oft before, will steal over that sacred ground and again enter the Eternal City. Be that as it may, history never has nor never will produce the like of a procession that moved in such simplicity, yet fraught with such power, as the one that could be seen approaching the world's center nearly two thousand years ago, and about four hundred years after its path had been laid down. Earth's greatest emperors had driven over that same way in most splendid state; queens and rulers, representing mighty powers adjacent to Latium, had been led along this path in a gorgeous captivity, and their power had crumbled as the dust beneath their feet.

On a certain day the sun shone down with all the warmth of an Italian spring

on a little band who had come a long journey, with many vicissitudes, in order to hold to the letter of the law when so respected a personage as a Roman citizen had appealed to Cæsar. From far Jerusalem they had started many months ago, where the prisoner had been arrested on the grievous charge of disturbing the public peace and creating dissenting religious factions. There the Roman Governor who had shielded him from the mob had failed to discover his guilt. Two years he had been imprisoned in Cæsarea, appearing before Felix, then Festus and Agrippa, whence we read those memorable words, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," and Agrippa also said unto Festus, "This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Cæsar." Then he took ship, and throughout that perilous voyage he alone was calm and undisturbed. Wrecked on the island of Malta for three months, the missionary spirit never forsook him for

an hour, and he there built an altar to the sublime faith. Faith! A faith that enwraps the earth and all the world; a faith that is chimed in a song by the eternal music of the spheres; a faith that uplifts all the hours of life and will wipe all sorrow and sighing away.

Paul of Tarsus spoke of faith in richest, fullest words that will go ringing in and out the old and new periods of all time, and he was the prisoner plodding the Appian Way. Ponderous thoughts weighed his mind; it had been his cherished desire to plant this faith in the strange, mixed soil of Rome—ROME—a thousand thoughts flitted by at the name. Had Paul pictured Rome as it actually was? Or could any one picture so great an enigma until they had in reality seen it? Who could describe the dying Paganism, the strange and corrupt creeds of emperors and people; of Stoics, Epicureans, Gnostics, and so-called philosophers; "the black immorality of priests and

their lax congregations; the barbarian buffoonery of emperor, and shameless revelry of senators and patricians; the awful fate of slaves and bondsmen? A people was Rome about to inaugurate the rule of a 'Beast,' who would welter in innocent bloodshed, and play the revolting game of world ruler and vilest criminal." Could Paul have foreseen such a Rome as this, would he have turned back in hopeless despair? Of much of it he must have known, for he most fervently hoped to reach it and tell of rest and peace for the weary and heavy-laden.

Perchance, though his heart was burdened with this sorrow for humanity, Paul yet looked about him as the beauties of Italy and the glories of the Appian Way unfolded themselves before him. They were now about forty miles from the city, at the little village of Appii Forum, and a few people greatly surprise the stolid Roman Centurion by approaching and joining his

little company. Had they known his prisoner before? No; most of them had not, but the Centurion saw among them a common band of love and sympathy, such as he had hardly thought existed in this cold world, even among kinsmen. What was this religion? Could it make him so happy? He had sought happiness in all the pleasures of life, and truly it was not to be found. How Paul's face brightened, how his step quickened, as he hastened to embrace these and kiss them in the name of the Master! On they walked and talked, paying little heed to "the conflux issuing forth or entering in the busy metropolis." Yet, methinks, Paul took sharp notice of it all and weighed possibilities. Then again his gaze wandered over to the misty Alban hills and over the rich Campagna, stretching away to the horizon and up to the very walls of the city. On every side were rich villas, structures of marble surrounded by handsome grounds, scarcely a vestige of which remains to-day on those fields.

Ten miles out of the city, at the "Three Taverns," their party had been augmented by other friends who had come out to meet the traveler. The soldiers thought it all so strange that a man who had never been in Rome should have so many friends there. They knew that he was the priest for a new religion that had started a little while ago in Judea, and they wondered how its supporters were already here in such numbers.

Far in the distance Paul of Tarsus first began to discern Rome, a mass of buildings raised on seven hills, with no church spires, and no Pantheon swung in mid-air as a dome to Christendom's biggest edifice. But there were other objects nearer to catch the eye of the travelers.

The noble Romans, in their veneration for this ancient Via Appia, had chosen to set up along its roadway the tombs of their most respected citizens, sepulchers of marble or flat Roman bricks veneered with marble, and with carved decorations; and to-day

there is to be seen along this most historical road of early civilization the decaying monuments and tombs of those whose names have long since filled the pages of history, such as the Scipios and the Julian gens, to which belonged Julius, the præfect in charge of St. Paul. Then the tomb of Cecilia Metella, a huge, round, tower-like mass of marble and much carving of scenes and figures, since then having served both as a prison and fortress, is now but a pile of mutilated bricks, stripped bare long ago by the hand of ruthless popes for selfish schemes. Strange coincidence, that by the side of these there should be chosen another burial place of such dimensions as to seem incredible and of such a nature as to far exceed the interest centered in any other.

Coming very near the city, the party were now passing by ground just beyond the tomb of Cecilia Metella, that was to hold beneath its surface the largest and most wonderful family burying-place of

"To the Forum they led him."

any ever to be built or excavated in the world. The kingly villas were to vanish on that magic tapis; marbles were to mix their dust with those now playing in the drama of life, and, more than all these, in the centuries and archives of history there was to rise that impenetrably deep, inscrutably mysterious witness of a power that forever clings about the sepulcher of that vast God's Acre. Could Paul have foreseen the extent of the tombs that his family was to occupy, could he have known the spread of that family throughout the earth—would his walk along the Appian Way have been one of greater interest or impetus to him than it was?

Straight to the Forum they lead him, just in front of the palaces of the Cæsars', to the very center of the world's power and magnificence, and there he was deliverd over to the præfect of the high Prætorian guard, who had charge over the emperor's prisoners.

A PRISONER'S FATE

CÆSAR only held court for prisoners' pleadings when it was most urgent, and frequently, if enemies of the prisoner so desired, the unfortunate one's trial could be easily put off or prolonged, and the victim could chafe in his chains upon the merest pretext.

It chanced that Paul came to wait some time before given audience, and, having gained the respect and confidence of his gaolers (even there is reason to believe that Julius adopted the new faith), he was given the highest leniency in the law. This could not mean freedom from being continually chained to a guardsman, but it meant so much that he was allowed to hire a house and dwell therein among his friends with all social privileges for two years, or until

the time of his first trial, when he again became a free man. This house where "Paul called the chief of the Jews together" may still be seen down by the Tiber, in an obscure part of the city, near the quarter of the Jews.

These two years of the prisoner's cramped activity in his own hired house were two of the most important years in the history of Christianity, only exceeded in their wealth and values by the three crowded ministerial years of the Lord Himself. Now one man was to Christianize all Europe, and he set about the stupendous task by remaining in one house, talking and preaching to chance comers, and gradually winning the guards who were in turn chained at his side. The days passed, and the prisoner could only guess at the results of his efforts. But already the Romans, from the wealthiest down to their slaves, were talking of the new sect and its rapid increase. Everywhere in the homes, even in

the household of the great Cæsar, this mighty power leveled those of high and low degree and made bondsmen and freemen alike.

Probably we shall never know just how or when Christianity was carried to the shores of Latium, but the condition of the soldier and the slave was fertile soil for its rapid propagation. All Rome was crowded with slaves. The aristocrat owned them, not by tens, but by hundreds, a thousand or more belonging to one household. Insurrection was only kept in check by an iron law, for a slave could be beaten, tortured, mutilated, and put to death at the mere pleasure of his lordly master. Thus in the planting of Christianity we are given to understand that: "From the Roman aristocracy Paul had little to fear and little to expect. Their whole life, physical, moral, intellectual, moved on a different plane from his. It was from the masses of the populace that he mainly hoped for

converts from the Gentiles, and it was from the Jews on the one hand and the emperor on the other that he had most to dread. The story of early Christianity is a story of many persecutions, days rife in the shedding of innocent blood." However, it was within a decade after Paul first entered Rome by the Appian Way that the Christians grew into a number far beyond his most sanguine expectations, a large body of worshipers having its ramifications penetrating into all strata of human society, and acting as that bit of leaven which grew and gave a new life to the whole.

Christianity has come to rule and reign, and to defy all attempts at annihilation perpetrated by emperors or earthly powers.

The day of Paul's trial came, and this Roman citizen, one of the world's ablest of lawyers, pleaded his own case, told of the mightiness of his God, and Cæsar trembled on his throne. The charges were almost a farce; there was no reason for further im-

prisonment of a man who simply preached a new religion. He should be free, and he was.

Thereupon Paul left Rome to build Churches elsewhere, and the months lengthened into years before he returned to find a Cæsar, the beast of all men, upon the throne.

There stood in the Forum, just below the palace, the Golden Milestone, from which "the roads radiated in all directions to the remotest verge of civilization," and messages and letters were sent along these celebrated Roman roads from post to post, with delivery established by the government. But now other letters, not differing in outward appearance from the ordinary ones, were sent over these roads, and they contained commands more powerful than the dispatches of Nero, commands that force rulers and States to-day, and they were written by this selfsame Paul. Meanwhile Paul preached and exhorted, and his con-

First floor of Nero's Golden Palace (demolished) overlooking the Forum, with Golden Milestone, below.

verts multiplied with astonishing rapidity. We are told that "the name which really defined them, in which they gloried, was the name of CHRISTIAN."

"I AM A CHRISTIAN" was a bond which they acknowledged among each other as a claim to any amount of mutual succor and sacrifice all over the world from Syria to Britain. "I am a Christian," was a confession they would maintain through any amount of torture unto death. An historian has said that "history has but few stranger contrasts than when it shows us Paul preaching Christ under the walls of Nero's palace." Some of the depraved servants of the palace were redeemed, and how deep their degradation was we know from authentic records, whose pages are polluted with details no writer in the language of Christendom dare repeat. Nero and the members of his household were instruments of vices so monstrous and so unnatural that they shocked even the men of

that generation, steeped as it was in every species of obscenity. Already, at the age of twenty-five, Nero had murdered his innocent wife and brother, and had dyed his hands in the blood of his mother; then married that most shameless of all women, his mistress, Poppea. In one of his wild, beastly orgies he withdrew outside the city of Rome, ordered it set on fire, then watched and sang through the conflagration in fiendish glee. A most pleasing thought occurred to this monster; he would attach the blame of this appalling disaster upon the Christians. In their strange teachings they had often threatened the destruction, not of the city only, but of the whole world, especially by fire. Therefore it was at least conceivable that they themselves should have set fire to Rome, so that when Nero looked for a scapegoat upon which to lay the disaster of his own burning of the capital he found it as easy as it was convenient to place all blame upon these offending per-

sons. Thereafter all Christians were to be persecuted. They were torn in the arena by wild beasts; they were covered with the skins of wild animals and set upon by ravishing dogs; they were wrapped in inflammable materials and burned as torches, several thousands of their burning bodies lighting the gardens of the monster on a festive night. Hence arose many of the persecutions of these first centuries, and the world knows the story of the suffering and the death of thousands of martyrs. Thereafter, in the centuries to come, the edicts of various emperors made all kinds of persecutions possible.

And Paul was arrested to be brought before the tribunal of this blood-stained adulterer. This time he had no hope for aught but death. The charges were heavy, such accusations as disturbing the Jews in their worship, which had been secured to them by law, of desecrating their temple, "and, above all, in violating the public peace

of the Empire by perpetual agitation, as the ringleader of a new and factious set." There was an express law against introducing religions new and illicit; it was treason against the commonwealth, and was punishable with death, which was the sentence that the apostle received.

When Paul took that last journey outside the city walls it was not by the Appian Way. Being a Roman citizen, he was exempt from an ignominious death of torture, but was to die by decapitation; and he was led out to execution on the road to Ostia, the port of Rome. A famous biographer has described it in these words: "As the martyr and his executioners passed on, their way was crowded with a motley multitude of goers and comers between the metropolis and its harbor. Merchants hastening to superintend the unloading of cargoes—sailors eager to squander the profits of their last voyage in the disssipations of the capital—officials of the govern-

ment, charged with the administration of the provinces, or the command of the legions on the Euphrates or the Rhine—Chaldean astrologers, Phrygian eunuchs, dancing girls from Syria, with their painted turbans,—merchant priests from Egypt, howling for Osiris—Greek adventurers, eager to coin their national cunning into Roman gold—representatives of the avarice and ambition, the fraud and the lust, the superstition and intelligence of the imperial world. Through the dust and tumult of that busy throng the small troop of soldiers wended their way silently, under the bright sky of an Italian mid-summer. They were marching, though they knew it not, in a procession more truly triumphal than any they had ever followed in the train of general or emperor along the Sacred Way. Their prisoner, now and at last and forever delivered from his captivity, rejoiced to follow his Lord without the Gate. The place of execution was not far distant, and

there the sword of the headsman ended his long course of suffering, and released the heroic soul from that feeble body. Weeping friends took up the corpse and carried it for burial to close subterranean labyrinths, where, through many ages of oppression, the persecuted Church found refuges for the living and sepulchers for the dead" —the CATACOMBS at Rome.

THE FAMILY TOMB

AS far back as we are able to go in Egyptian and some other Oriental history, we are impressed with the scientific care which the ancients took of their dead and their hygienic burials. So the Romans used that same ancient superiority, and two different customs were largely practiced, both that of cremating and that of burying the body entire. As the practice of burning the body was largely favored, there still remains to be seen about Rome subterranean rooms, with many niches, holding vases of various patterns, in which are sealed human ashes. These vaults are called the Columbari, after the Latin for doves, since they resemble dove-cots.

Then gradually the old families of wealth and position adopted the custom of

erecting tombs to serve as monuments to their riches and station, and in which they buried the bodies embalmed, as seen in the ruins of many sepulchral edifices along the Appian Way.

But there is in this locality a family tomb greater than any others to be mentioned; the most stupendous monument of the most stupendous fact in history, a living, breathing, speaking monument of the newborn Christian Church. The Christians were bound together as one great family, bound by the same laws of love and charity, by the same fears and persecutions, by the same symbols and signs of a great religion, and as a family they were laid by thousands in the same tomb. It has been both claimed and denied that the opportunity for the first burials came more by chance than design.

Explanations have been founded upon this evidence: The soil of Italy is rich in building materials, fine sand, tufa, and

"Vases of sealed human ashes."

beautiful marbles everywhere abounding. Outside of Rome there were large excavations for these, and portions of the Campagna were undermined to a large extent. Sand-diggers were employed in great numbers from the commonest ranks of people, and Christianity, spreading as it did among such, picked up many converts from these laborers. Consequently it has been natural to conclude that when death came their bodies should be laid away in these great caverns. Again we learn that it was only as entrances to the real strata of the Catacombs that the excavations of the sand-diggers were used, and that the excavations for the Catacombs were begun by no mere chance, but for the sole purpose of the interment of the dead. The bodies, instead of being cremated, as were most of the poor and lowly, should be put away entire, the more preferable fashion adopted by those of rank and wealth. Yet again, perchance they preferred this mode for other impor-

tant reasons. It was an impressive fact to them that the body of their Lord had been laid in the tomb, wrapped in fine linen and spices. He had promised them a resurrection, and these simple folk had connected the temporal body with that estate. The Jews had inherited this Eastern custom of burial, and had brought it to Rome. "Prudentius states that the prospect of a resurrection was a motive of the honors and attentions paid to the departed. 'There will come a time when genial warmth shall revisit these bones and the soul shall resume its former tabernacle, animated with living blood. . . . For this reason is such care bestowed upon the sepulcher: such honor paid to the motionless limbs—such luxury displayed in funerals. . . . What do these excavated rocks signify? What these fair monuments? What but that the object intrusted to them is sleeping, and not dead. . . . But now death itself is blessed, since through its pangs is thrown open to the just

a way from sorrow to the stars. . . . We will adorn the hidden bones with violets and many a bough; and on the epitaph and cold stones we will sprinkle liquid odors.' "

And yet again persecutions were rife, ridicule and calumny were heaped upon them, the world was hostile to their purity, faith, and charity; their religion was under ban, and they must needs do things secretly, so here in the bowels of the earth, among whose labyrinths none dared to venture except the hired diggers, the bodies were hidden safely away, free from molestation of unholy hands.

If we can grasp the fact of Christianity's rapid increase, and remember that for over three hundred years, including a century under Constantine, the whole Christian population of Rome was interred there, and that in that city "peopled by more than a million inhabitants, so far Christianized as to give rise to general complaint that the altars and temples of the gods were

deserted," and that the number of converts at the time of Decius alone was fifty thousand, then we must think of no ordinary dimensions. Add to this the fact that it was considered a horror to disinter a single body, and that also in times of great persecution as many as sixty are known to have been buried in one enlarged sepulcher, then we can begin to realize how the Catacombs soon grew to be the most stupendous testimony to the faith, "save only Christian Scriptures, and the Christian Church itself, still surviving long ages of kindred opposition." There are no monuments to pagan belief and worship, no pyramids of Egypt, no temples of Greece, that are more of a witness to the power of a faith than these undermined recesses of darkness.

"AFTER NINETEEN CENTURIES"

ON the last day of May, fifteen hundred and seventy-eight, laborers were digging in the fields of the Campagna, just outside of Rome, when their implements broke into a large cavern. It was of such unusual appearance and gave evidence of relics and bodies long since buried, together with paintings and inscriptions, that the authorities were immediately apprised of the fact. Like each new discovery, this one was credited with caution at its inception; then people suddenly began to remember that before the pall of the Dark Ages had settled upon them this ground had been used by earliest Christians as a sort of refuge asylum and cemetery. Thereupon the Church now seized control of the site, and the archæologist was per-

mitted to explore. One came for a few months and staid twenty years. Within the sixteenth century the entire range of the Catacombs was re-opened, and the sacred dust of more than a thousand years was upturned. Old traditions long since died out were brought to light, and "the fascinations of 'Roma Sotteranea' were fixed tentacles upon the minds of scholars and explorers."

There is necessarily a dispute at present as to the number of the Catacombs, for several that were once separated are now classed under one name. Some authorities have said there were forty-two, others have said sixty or more. Neither of these large numbers convey a correct impression, for the traveler in Rome to-day, or a reader upon the subject, rarely hears of or reads of more than seven better known names for the entire classification. As previously mentioned, they all lie outside the walls of the city, mostly in one general direction,

scattered over a comparatively small portion of the vast, desolate Campagna, with entrances situated somewhere near the popular Appian Way.

Shortly after arriving in Rome the first journey to the Catacombs became uppermost in our minds, so we planned for a day's excursion especially devoted to them. It must be a walking tour for several reasons: first, there is something in the air of Rome in the fall of the year that compels you to walk, in sheer pleasure of the exhilaration that lifts you up out of yourself; again, although carriage hire is very cheap, compared with America, yet it would be folly to take one for the day when expecting to be out of it so much, and underground.

The morning was ideal, and, leaving our apartment near the Piazza di Spagna, we walked down through ancient, modernized streets, stopping at the little shops to pick up tempting things for our lunch box. Our

first objective point was the tomb of St. Paul, in the church of his name, San Paolo, Outside the Walls. Over by the Forum, the heart of the ancient city, in the Mamertine Prison, is the underground cell in which, according to Roman Catholic tradition, Sts. Peter and Paul were jailed. The tradition so far as Paul is concerned may have some foundation of truth, but neither the conscientious historian nor archæologist can find any proof of Peter ever having been in the Eternal City. Across the Tiber, by the Church of San Pietro in Monitorio, they will take you into the little chapel said to be over the spot where he was crucified, head downwards, and they will dig up a bit of a soil from beneath a tiny aperture, and tell you it was trodden by the sacred feet. It is all only one more vivid reminder of their vain superstitions. In that vast mausoleum, built to a fisherman, the great St. Peter's, you may be awed by the hundred lamps, never dimmed, about the marbled

sarcophagus, and you may feel a little thrill when you peep at the small golden casket, which they tell you contains the apostle's bones, and then you turn away with disinterest, for you are reminded that all it is falls down on the words, "They say."

But all this is not so in regard to St. Paul, for even profane history proves many of his footsteps in Rome, and it is with a feeling akin to a deep reverence that you approach his tomb. So the writer and friend left the city that morning, going partly by tram through the Porta Ostiensis, or the Porta San Paolo as it is now more frequently called, for this was the way that St. Paul passed to his martyrdom. It is said to be the most picturesque of the gates of Rome, being double and built in the times of two early emperors. The outer gateway has one arch, the inner two flanked with stone towers. On the right of the entrance is an imposing pyramid, originally faced with smooth slabs of marble, and standing

on a travertine base ninety-five feet in diameter, the whole being one hundred and fifteen feet high. It was erected as a tomb some twenty or thirty years before Christ for Caius Cestius (an entablature speaks of him as an Epicurean, but it would read more truly if plain Anglo-Saxon glutton was spelled there instead). Seven times a day his table was spread with a feast, and his insatiable vanity would have a tomb different from all others in his cosmopolitan city, a pyramid of no mean proportions, veneered in marble. After having passed the walls, it does not seem long until the finest of Roman churches begins to charm with its beauty. Once inside, it is truly "one vast hall of marble, with eighty Corinthian pillars forming the nave, and reflected in the marble pavement." The restoration has been most complete and beautiful since the fire of 1823. Below the altar the tomb of Paul is shadowed by a bronze canopy supported by four pillars of Oriental alabas-

ter, presented by Mehemet Ali, Pasha of Egypt. Below this is the tomb of Timothy. Many beautiful things are to be found about the edifice, particularly two altars of malachite presented by a Czar of Russia, and paintings and statues in great numbers. Quite up against the high ceiling, reaching almost around the interior, are two hundred and sixty portraits of popes, laid in wonderful mosaic, splendidly lifelike for not having been done by brush. Pope Peter comes first with heavy brown whiskers, and, according to Catholic lists again, Linus is second, whose very bright eyes follow you everywhere. You may chance to overhear a guide telling his party that the present Queen of Portugal, a lineal descendant of Pope Linus, presented two immense diamonds, each valued at $1,000, for the portrait's eyes.

But your own eyes look away, and turn once more back to the beautiful altar of malachite so green and shining, and the

precious pillars of alabaster; for here, beneath the transept, where the wings of the church cross the long nave, just as the arms of the cross transept its beam, where, architecturally speaking, the head of Christ would lie, here in the most sacred spot of the cruciform church, we are told, lie all that is mortal of Paul of Tarsus and his beloved Timothy. With the possibility of this filling you with awe, you recede from the presence along that flawless marble floor, out among those violet marbled columns sending their capitols of white and heliotrope up into the ceiling of gold, a wonderful dream it seems to you, on out into the sunlit air of reality.

O, the marble! the marble! O Italia, Italia, when comes the exhaustion of your quarries, pillaged and plundered! Everywhere we find the wealth of them stored in houses and castles, churches and temples, gardens and fields, tombs and mausoleums, underground and above ground, all built

from your storehouse of precious blocks. We know that at one time Michael Angelo tore down the marble columns of ancient St. Peter, shattering their noble proportions, and then went off to your exhaustless quarries for more, bringing back eleven carloads of priceless shafts to lie neglected on the ground.

Just beyond the Church of St. Paul's is the Place of Three Fountains, where Paul was beheaded; but, turning to a road to the left of the church, the Strada delle Sette Chiese, or the Way of the Seven Churches, you find yourself taking a cross cut to the Appian Way.

"The Catacombs of St. Domitilla"

The perfection of the morning seemed to be enhanced as we turned down the beautiful country road, for there was nothing to mar the rural peace nor disturb us except several coachmen at the outset, each insist-

ing that we take his carriage, his was the cheapest and best, and one unpleasantly insisting as to the necessity; so he followed several hundred feet, and would not leave off until I turned about, appearing very angry and stamping my foot. This brought a volley of invectives from him in the regular heated style of Southern blood, and two lone women felt relief to see him wheel abruptly and join his jeering fellows. We turned our faces toward the path before us; here stretched the soft country roadway, bordered by everything green, for no bright colors yet appeared in this warm Italian November. Now and then a green, glittering lizard darted across our path, not stopping to seek acquaintanceship, and the short journey was uneventful until we spied a signboard some distance ahead, glaring white letters on a low building off the road, announcing the location of the Catacomb St. Domitilla, and that spot to be the entrance. Proceeding to the gateway, we

entered a garden stocked with relics of the past, and ancient burial appointments. An open doorway invited us, and upon going in and being persuaded to pay an entrance fee of one lira, or twenty cents each, we were now entitled to a rich investigation. In one of the rooms hung pictures of M. de Rossi and his colleagues, that noble explorer, who, with thirty years of study and preparation, unearthed the storied history and grand testimony of the Catacombs from under centuries of oblivion.

At the entrance of this catacomb of St. Domitilla is a magnificent basilica or church, with three naves, erected about the close of the fourth century, in honor of the saints Nereus, Achilles, and Petronilla. These names, with that of Domitilla, do much to remind the visitor that he is meeting the true romance of history, for the catacomb takes its name from Flavia Domitilla, niece of the Emperor Domitian, and whose husband, Titus Flavius Clemens,

was nephew of the Emperor Vespasian. So this royal family, Domitilla, and her husband embraced Christianity, and were accused of atheism by their emperor uncle, Domitian, who was then persecuting the Christians. "Some he put to death, and others had their goods confiscated." Domitilla was banished to the island of Paudataria, and her husband was put to death. Later there was a younger Domitilla, a niece, also banished, and she was accompanied by her two Christian servants, Nereus and Achilles, whose banishment is spoken of by St. Jerome as a "life-long martyrdom." It is said that her cell was visited by St. Paul, and that she was afterwards brought back to mainland to be burnt alive at Terracina, because she refused to sacrifice to idols. In this catacomb are preserved many of her relics. It is so full of evidence of her life and the customs of the times that this catacomb must be classed with the first century, *the oldest burial*

ground of them all, leading back to the forms of worship of the first church, set up immediately after the Lord's ministerial period. It has been recently understood in Rome that the Catholic Church, in making explorations in hitherto undiscovered parts of this earliest burial ground, found such direct evidences of the apostolic forms of worship as to be in direct contradiction to the forms now employed by that branch of the Church, and that they are keeping these discoveries strictly within a small circle of themselves, being loath to expose the present-day variance.

Descending a magnificent marble staircase, we enter a chamber brilliantly illumined by the light of day, coming in through numerous apertures called illuminare. In all probability it was this chamber which contained the sepulchers of Sts. Nereus and Achilles, and here St. Gregory delivered his twenty-eighth homily, in which he says, "These saints, before whose tomb we are

assembled, despised the world and trampled it under their feet, when peace, plenty, riches, and health gave its charms." To-day this room is scattered with fragments of broken marble, covered with inscriptions stripped from the tombs. They are in both Latin and Greek, and are of great value from a religious point of view. Some of them give evidence that early Christian families made subterranean chambers at their own expense and for their own use. "Marcus Aurelius made this subterranean for himself and those of his family who believed in the Lord," is found on a loose stone, and it also shows that many of his family were still pagan, and is unquestionably a proof of very high antiquity.

Converging from this chamber are many surrounding galleries which contain the loculi or places for the dead. These galleries are of the widest and loftiest in this catacomb. Leaving the bright apartment by an exit in the side wall, the explorer

immediately finds himself in a long, low, narrow gallery, utterly dark except for the feeble rays of his candle, which the guide had lighted for him just previous to his entrance. Groping along the way, the candle's fitful light will half reveal, half disclose the bare, brown walls, floor, ceiling, and sides all irregularly hollowed out of the hard, dark earth. We marvel that here where such a construction of a strange burial place seemed necessary, that Mother Earth should have ready the very substance best suited for these cities of the dead. We call it tufa or rock, a composite of a volcanic nature, of a medium density, neither hard rock nor soft soil, yet easily cut and impervious to water.

No drafted plans were ever made for the construction of the Catacombs; according to the custom of the times, the poor families began delving out their tombs down in the soft rock, other families joined those bound together by Christian ties of friendship,

coming to place their dead side by side, never an idea of following a regular line of excavation. As burials increased by the hundreds and thousands, making way for the entire Christian family, rich and poor, popes, bishops, priests, saints, and martyrs alike, the galleries crossed and recrossed, some running straight for a few yards or hundreds of yards, all forming a vast network of passages and connecting as contiguous cemeteries. The passage is never more than two and a half to four feet in width, and seven to ten feet high, and on either side at irregular intervals, though sometimes regular enough, are the openings, rectangularly delved, and in which are laid the bodies of the dead, shelved away, sometimes seven, one above the other. After the dead were placed within, the openings were covered with marble slabs and hermetically sealed, so that each grave was concealed and kept within itself the ravages of decomposition. The tombs dug out like

shelves in the rock, of different sizes according to the body to be placed therein, have for the most part no inscriptions; again, a single adjective will describe some attribute of the sleeper, his piety, affection, or the words "In Pace" (peace), "At Rest," fraught with double meaning to the persecuted Christian of the day.

In addition to these brief epitaphs, or often when there is no epitaph at all, there is a symbolical reference made plain in some such emblem as the dove, the palm branch, the anchor, or the multifarious fish. We are told that all the sides of these dark earthy passages were originally covered with a marble veneer, and that when the Catacombs went into disuse, various popes, architects, and builders came and stripped them of their precious marble, and made many new Romes of them in the centuries of the city's several devastations.

To get a clearer idea of the extent of these galleries, imagine that after taking a

few steps forward you can either continue for often a very long distance, or turn to either side into branch galleries which shoot off in every direction most frequently, and which in their turn lead on into countless others, here and there, nearby and far distant. Presently you may come to a stairway dug downwards out of the hard earth, and, descending, you find yourself on another plane, traversing similar countless galleries. Again you can descend another story, and yet again, for in all probability there will be always three stories, frequently five, with their miles of serried tombs stretching away in every direction, while in one catacomb, that of St. Calixtus, there is a part comprised of seven stories. Should one be associating this mass of deep excavations with the New York Underground Railway, or the London Tuppenny Tube, or some other such twentieth century feats, the vastness of the idea might appear more credible. Strangely wonderful and unreal

does it seem to put it back fifteen to nineteen hundred years ago.

But the Catacombs are not altogether a series of narrow galleries, for frequently the visitor takes a step and finds himself through an entrance within a small chamber, often feebly lighted by a ray of sunlight shooting down a shaft. These chambers are numerous, and several different reasons may be assigned to their construction. Coming at the intersection of main passages, these rooms were formed sometimes with considerable dimensions, and then became burial places for persons of noted families, or for those of peculiar sanctity, as for a martyr. Again, there would be not only one of these special chambers, but a series of two, three, or five, forming private vaults to which the family could come and keep its funeral feasts and other sad rites. These chambers are decorated with paintings in fresco or sculptured sarcophagi, and which furnish a large store of

information concerning the manner and form of early worship. It is believed that here in these rooms, with their immediate surrounding passages, the multitudes gathered for secret worship, and during times of severe persecution the up-ground entrances to the Catacombs could be easily concealed, or while some were guarded the fugitives could gather for the celebration of the Eucharist, and then make good their escape by a secret exit.

In these small chambers or cubicula the places for interment are arranged differently from those of the narrow galleries; they are the table tomb and the arched tomb or arcosolium. These were the graves of persons distinguished either through family or martyrdom to the cause. This recess hollowed out above the chest-tomb had a special use made of it for the celebration of certain mysteries. It was converted into an altar, and to this altar as a place of worship comrades came, on anniversaries filling

the room, as many as an hundred, or still more could be gathered in an adjoining cubicula. Not only in ecclesiastical writings do we learn that here they worshiped and celebrated the feast of the Lord's Supper, but in the very walls of the chambers we have circumstantial evidence in the episcopal chairs found there, "chairs for the presiding deacon or deaconess, and benches for the faithful formed part of the original design, when the tomb was first opened, hewn out of the rock, and still remaining."

This catacomb of St. Domitilla, sometimes called that of Sts. Nereus and Achilles, is now considered to be the oldest of all others. It is certainly the richest storehouse of the very first customs and offices of the earliest Church organizations.

Catacombs of St. Calixtus

Probably the most interesting catacombs of all, and of those most frequently visited by tourists, are those of St. Calixtus, lying

about two miles from the city wall, directly on the frequented Appian Way, where one can stand on the slight elevation above them and overlook the historic Campagna, far to the Alban hills. These catacombs are of later date than the first century, and they contain graves not only of famous popes well known in Church history, some of them martyrs, but also of other martyrs, notably the grave of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of Music, whom Raphael has immortalized upon glowing canvas.

On a visit to these interesting ruins one will find them in charge of a few Trappist monks, who reside in some small buildings above the ground and keep a shop for the selling of pictures and various souvenirs, one especially being a little marble reproduction of the body of St. Cecilia as it was found some centuries after death, well preserved, but turned in its position, with the cut of the executioner's saber still to be seen on the neck, and the head attached to the body.

A traveler says that, after a monk had taken him into his "back-yard" (mercy, how American!), he expected to find here at the entrance to these catacombs "some great architectural demonstration, but there was nothing in sight except an upraised mound that looked like the entrance to a West Texas stormhouse more than anything else. Imagine our astonishment when the old priest wobbled straight to that stormhouse and, without preliminaries or hesitation, stepped into the dark hole, remarking as he stooped and led the way, 'Look for your heads, zhendlemen.' "

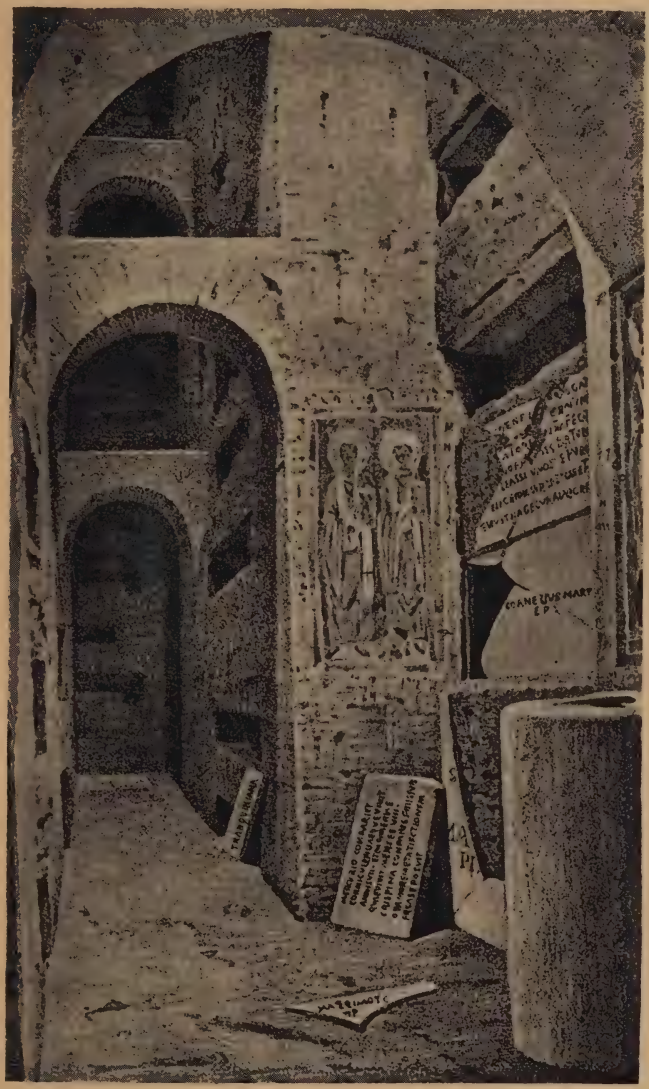
And here was the fat priest, in a dirty brown robe, ever so much more sophisticated than our attentive guide in civilian dress at Domitilla's, and leading us unceremoniously to that stormhouse (fancy a stormhouse on the Campagna). Under this rude covering were the ancient steps carved out seventeen hundred years ago, badly worn by millions of feet, but now restored

from further decay and dilapidation with facings of marble.

The first underground entrance-room is one of the cubicula chambers, a sepulchral cubiculum for burial, interspersed through the galleries, from which the door leads into that most interesting room, the chapel of the popes. This chapel was a place of burial and worship in the third and fourth centuries. "The walls are lined with the graves of the earliest popes, many of them martyrs." "We know that ancient tradition speaks of the Vatican as the resting place of the earliest bishops of Rome, coupled with the name of St. Peter; though, be it added, tradition does not speak of him as a bishop."

But it was in this catacomb that the early bishops were laid to rest, many of them martyrs, side by side the saints and martyrs of humbler rank in the Church.

The name of each pope suggests a period of bloody history and persecutions



"The walls are lined with the graves of the earliest popes."

upon which early Christianity seemed to thrive. There are here the remains of the ancient altar upon which many popes conducted sacred rites in the presence of the tombs of their martyred colleagues. The recess before which this altar stood appears as an old fireplace, made of the flat Roman brick, now mostly demolished. In front of this is the marble platform of the altar, composed of two sections; the first having the grooves whereupon rested four handsome marble columns, some of the scattered fragments of which are now lying about the chapel, a vivid testimony to their ancient beauty. Other fragments of stone are about, with Greek inscriptions, which was the language of the early Church. We are reminded that this historic chamber, as well as most of this group of catacombs, were all reopened by Pope Damascus (366-84), for this beautifully cut inscription was found over the altar: "(Damascus) whose labor of love it was to rediscover the tombs,

which had been blocked up for concealment under Diocletian, to remove the earth, widen the passages, adorn the sepulchral chambers with marble, and support the friable tufa walls with arches of brick and stone." Damascus was buried in the chapel above the entrance.

There are three points of historic interest in this catacomb of St. Calixtus: "First, the roof-shaped tomb of Pope S. Melchiades, who lived long in peace, and died in 313. Second, the cubiculum of Pope S. Eusebius, with one of the beautiful inscriptions of Pope Damascus, translated:

" 'Heraclius forbade the lapsed to grieve for their sins; Eusebius taught those unhappy ones to weep for their crimes; the people were rent into parties, and with increasing fury began sedition, slaughter, fighting, discord, and strife. Straightway both (the pope and heretic) were banished by the cruelty of the tyrant, although the pope was preserving the bonds of peace in-

Tomb of Pope S. Cornelius, and stairway of exit.

violate. He bore his exile with joy, looking to the Lord as his judge, and on the shore of Sicily gave up the world and his life.' "

Third, the place is that "near the exit, properly in the catacombs of St. Lucina, connected with Lucina by a labyrinth of galleries, is the tomb of Pope S. Cornelius (251-52), the only Roman bishop down to the time of S. Sylvester (314) who bore the name of any noble family, and whose epitaph, perhaps in consequence, is in Latin, while others are in Greek. The tomb has no chapel of its own, but is a mere grave in the gallery, with a rectangular instead of a circular space above, as in the cubicula. Near the tomb are fragments of one of S. Damascus's commemorative inscriptions, ingeniously restored by De Rossi, thus:

" 'Behold, a way down has been constructed and the darkness dispelled, you see the monuments of Cornelius and his sacred tomb. This work of zeal Damascus has accomplished, sick as he is, in order that

the approach might be better, and the aid of the saint be convenient for the people, and that if you will pour forth prayers from a pure heart, Damascus may rise up better in health, though it has not been love of life, but care for work, that has kept him (here below).'"

St. Cornelius was banished under Gallus, then was brought back to Rome and martyrdom, September 14, 252. On the same day of the month, 258, his friend and correspondent, S. Cyprian, archbishop of Carthage, was martyred, and is subsequently commemorated by the Church on the same day. Therefore, on the right of the grave are two figures of bishops with inscriptions declaring them to be S. Cornelius and S. Cyprian. Each holds the book of the Gospels in his hands and is clad in pontifical robes.

Again on through the many interlacing passages we find once more the similar loculi, a few still sealed, the most but yawn-

ing cavities, where either the mortal remains have long since disintegrated, mingling with the dust drapery of their earthy couch, where an occasional skeleton or a small part of one lies still hideous in its slow decomposition, or where too often the empty grave yawns with a tale of useless despoiling and wanton devastation.

On and on, and down or up again, we can go to the different pianos, or stories; and while we remember that the Goths in the sixth and seventh centuries came and desecrated this holy ground, we can not forget that Popes Paul and Paschal, thinking to honor and shield the dead, gathered their bones promiscuously, we fear, placing them in heaps under Christian churches, or, to impress upon the living converts, piling them up in gruesome and fantastic decorations along some chapel wall.

The tourist does not forget that there is to be found the tomb of St. Cecilia, a very large chamber with an arched roof, and con-

taining resting places for several bodies, apertures of unequal sizes hollowed in the walls; but that where Cecilia lay is on the level with the floor, and is a space arched over with bricks, so that the opening appears as a large old-fashioned fireplace. The history concerning this famous woman is largely legendary, but the name is used by the world in connection with music more than any other patron saint. It was she who continually heard strains of divine music, and when she suffered martyrdom she was buried by her friend Pope Urban, A. D. 224 (this can not be authenticated). Her body was discovered by Pope Paschal I, in 820, to whom its resting place had been revealed in a dream, "fresh and perfect as when it was first laid in the tomb, and clad in rich cloth mixed with gold, with linen garments stained with blood rolled up at her feet, lying in a cypress coffin." Close to the entrance of the cubiculum, upon the wall, is a painting of Cecilia, "a woman

richly attired, and adorned with bracelets and necklaces." Near it is a niche for the lamp which burned before the shrine, at the back of which is a large head of our Savior, "of the Byzantine type, and with rays of glory behind it in the form of a Greek cross." There are other figures on the wall: that of Pope Urban, and those of some saints.

Catacombs of St. Pretextatus.

There is another burial ground, whose workmanship puts it unmistakably at a very early date, and that is the catacombs of St. Pretextatus. This has been classified as early as the year of our Lord 175. However, the manner of construction is very different from that of St. Domitilla or from others. Early writers describe it as "a very large cavern, most firmly built," and this is because it was built with bricks, and not hewn out of a rock. The Acts of the Saints tells us that St. Marmenia, an early Chris-

tian of some wealth, "caused it to be excavated immediately below his own house."

Other catacombs, such as St. Agnese, all have practically the same construction as Domitilla and Calixtus, some of them being considered a part of these two best-known ones. All were built in the first two to four centuries after Christ's ministry.

The History of the Catacombs.

The history of the Catacombs may be divided into four unequal parts. In the first, a period of about four hundred years, they were in almost constant use. This included all the construction, the decoration, the burials, and the years of suffering martyrdom. From the edicts of Hadrian, about 117, to those of Valerian, 253, was a lengthened period of peace, and even churches were built to the faith, and copies of holy writings were made. This preceded the fearful edict of Diocletian, when, to express it in the words of the historian, "pa-

ganism became alarmed for its very existence." Everywhere the last effort of pagan fury seemed to expend itself. Churches were reduced to ashes and a mere pile of stones; martyrs were burned at many stakes; Christians of high station were sold into slavery; the bishop was committed to prison; and all sacred writings were gathered together and burned in great heaps. Then, after all this dying unto death, after the untold tortures of generations of Christian martyrs, the story of which can never be realized by any reader, however sympathetic, there came, as in that strange providence the leaders of an age do come, a Christian emperor. It was in the memorable year of 319 that Constantine, having humbled himself before that bright, shining cross, began to lead the Christians. Within twelve years all heathen temples were ordered to be destroyed, and Christianity became the religion of State, courtly in its manner and garb. The wretched, persecuted

men hiding in caves, worshiping in fear and trembling, came forth to find this "religion of shepherds and fishermen had conquered the very seat of imperial power." Christianity sat upon the throne in royal splendor, and the dark Catacombs were forgotten. In the second period they were in the hands of barbarians, who for five hundred years besieged the Eternal City, made desolate the Campagna, plundered the Catacombs, and generally changed the map of Europe. Alaric with his Visigoths first advanced on Rome; then came Vandals, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Normans, and Saracens, each carrying away precious relics of the Christian forefathers. In the meantime various popes, in order to protect the sainted dead, had many of the bodies removed to the churches within the city walls, and multitudes of marble slabs were torn from their moorings in subterranean depths, to be used in redecorating pillaged Rome. Then for a third period of seven hundred

years the Catacombs lay in a state of almost unbroken quiet; the reign of ignorance and superstition, the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, all made the people forget the real cradle of the Church. For the last three hundred years the fourth period has been one of sacred unearthing, of scientific rediscovery and of tourist visits. Not a scholar, not an inquiring traveler now visits their dark chambers but that he comes under the spell of their greatness, their strange, rude art, and its multiplicity of symbols; and then one asks, "Whence came the spirit and the motive for all this?"

The spirit and the motive had been so many times oppressed and trodden to the death that it appears only divine fire could have fed the constant rekindling of the flame. Law, calumny, ridicule, Gnosticism, and Judaism were all hurled at the new faith. The very first converts to Christianity were of Jewish and heathen religions, and the Church long felt the modifying ef-

fects of their prejudices. Jewish tenacity for that which was old, and heathen roots of mythology left great impressions. The philosophy of Plato and Aristotle sought to establish an end to that of Jesus Christ. Later, Neo-Platonism introduced many heresies. All this would pollute the creed of any ordinary religion. Moreover, the Roman civilization was "corrupting and degrading the whole earth." What a contrast to the black life, the shameless lusts, and murderous riots was the pure and spotless Bride of Christ! Each dying martyr proclaimed her purity and gladly died in her enfolding arms. Within that wicked city there sprang up a silent city of men and women banded together in the service of this Bride, the Church. They called each other "Brother" and "Sister," and spoke among them a name which seemed to make them feel supreme power over all obstacles in their lives. The name represented one of the humblest of earth's dwellers,

whose own countrymen had put Him to death as a criminal. They spoke of Him as alive, yet all knew that He had died. They believed in immortality, but that belief came not through "nicely balanced arguments," nor through a dream of "ancient faith shrouded in mysteries." It was simply a swallowing up of death in life, which made "death to them but an incident in life." This was far different from any faith yet put out, and so they came to be distinguished as "brothers, disciples, believers," the whole society demanding universal allegiance, claiming to be in itself an universal kingdom, yet all resolving itself into an absorbing, personal devotion never approached in the annals of history.

LIFE, WORSHIP, MARTYRDOM IN THE CATACOMBS

THE paintings in portrait of saints upon the walls represent to us something more than productions of the art of the period; they speak to us of lives that were sometimes partly lived and ended within the precincts of those dark caverns. There would be no denying the fact that life could be maintained in those dismal regions, for every now and then one will come to an air shaft, tiny, yet admitting a little stream of light and air from green fields above. Wells and springs have been discovered; one, named the Font of St. Petern, was long used for baptism. There have been much evidence and proof of life having been maintained in the corridors for indefinite periods, especially that of refuge in times of persecution; even the

life of cattle was so maintained. We are reminded that, "had the intricacies of the Catacombs been well known to the heathen authorities, or the entrances limited in number to two or three, they would doubtless have afforded an insecure asylum. But the entrances were numberless, scattered over the Campagna for miles, and the labyrinth below so occupied by the Christians, and so blocked up in various places by them, that pursuit must have been almost useless."

The heathens realized the importance of the Catacombs as a sure and safe retreat, and edicts were issued accordingly, forbidding entrance, under penalty of death, which sentence was often carried out.

About the year of 117 to 138, Hadrian attempted justice in his edict by requiring a fair trial, and punishment in proportion to the offense, "not wishing the Christians to be harassed, nor malicious informers to be encouraged, but punished." But Valerian, in 253, forbade the Christians to as-

semble at the cemeteries on pain of death. Yet this they managed in a measure to disregard, as there were so many secret entrances and exits to the Catacombs. Any imperial soldier would long hesitate before taking the risk of losing his way in their long, dark caverns.

This matter of residence brings us to another, equally obvious: that of worship there; for the presence of the chapels, with their altar tombs, is first evidence; then the finding of episcopal chairs, fonts, and indications of the celebration of the Eucharist and Agapæ, have added conclusiveness.

Before Constantine there were no structures set apart for worship; congregations must be accommodated, especially when edicts forbade them gathering in the city; hence their first and last great refuge, those many intricate corridors; there where their own loved ones lay waiting the summons of the resurrection; there, with lamps in their hands, they too, as the virgins had

told them of, awaited their Bridegroom; and these the Church, in some form of service and worship, kept offering herself as His bride.

The act of worship then was a greater source of annoyance to various emperors and greater reason for their edicts than mere assemblies. One well-known inscription found over one of the graves in the cemetery of St. Calixtus reads thus: "In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but lives beyond the stars, and his body rests in this tomb. He lived under the Emperor Antonine, who, foreseeing that great benefit would result from his services, returned evil for good. For while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. O, sad times! in which sacred rites and prayers, even in caverns, afford no protection to us. What can be more wretched than such a life? and what than such a death? when they could not be buried by their friends and relations—at length they

sparkle in heaven. He has scarcely lived, who has lived in Christian times." And so the long-suffering martyrs often could not be buried by friends or relatives, and their bodies were more often reduced to ashes by their persecutors, who believed that this destroyed all possibility of resurrection.

The very rapidity of the growth of the new religion incensed the pagans, and the seeming proselyting from their ranks incurred pagan hatred and incited to persecution. Martyrdom forms one great chapter in the world's history, and page after page is taken up with the description of the horrors suffered by the followers of Christ, who gloried in the fact that they could suffer for His sake. Some instruments of persecution were found in the Catacombs, as forceps (the ungula), combs, etc., for tearing the flesh. Other instruments are to be seen in the Vatican, but their newness can not deceive the antiquarian.

Shortly after the Diocletian persecution we begin to find first record of martyrs' worship. The martyr began to be looked upon as being of peculiar sanctity. It was he who interceded with the Church in behalf of the excommunicated, and *this began to be confounded as intercession between God and man,* and then he was described "as ascending to heaven, charged with petitions to be presented before the throne, and followed thither by fresh prayers and praises"—and so prayers were addressed to him, the phrasing often being the same as used in divine worship, and gradually the martyr became a saint, to be worshiped as the Protomartyr Himself. This worship grew to an enormous extent, as a Christian would sometimes live for indefinite periods in the Catacombs, then suffer martyrdom within their confines, and his mutilated body, or a part of it, perchance only the blood gathered into a vessel, would be set up as a shrine, and wor-

ship would be carried on there ever afterwards. So we find many such shrines of martyrdom.

It is of interest to cite some manufactured saints, for the people became so eager in their indulgence of martyr worship as to seize upon the slightest thing which would offer opportunity to proclaim sainted martyrdom. For instance, Mabillon tells of persons in Spain finding an ancient stone with inscriptions "S. VIAR," who took it as the epitaph of a Saint Viar, and at once set up his worship. Roman antiquarians immediately found it to be the fragment of an inscription to [PRÆFECTU] S. VIAR[UM], a curator of the ways.

Quite the most interesting and pretentious of pseudo saints is the legend of St. Veronica. In St. Peter's there is a colossal statue of a woman by this name, and the thousands worship her and her sacred handkerchief. "About the darkest time of the Middle Ages," we are told, "arose the cus-

tom of painting a so-called likeness of the Savior upon cloth;" beneath it were inscribed the words "Vera icon," meaning true likeness. In 1249 a Cistercian abbess wrote to the pope's chaplain, requesting that he send her a copy of the picture in St. Peter's. He complied, begging her to receive "a Holy Veronica, Christ's true image." The next stage in the growth of the legend was the discovery that the original Veronica was an actual impression of our Savior's features miraculously taken at some time or other during the agony in the garden or on the way to Calvary, or, as some supposed, to have been left on the head-dress in the sepulcher. But the story still wanted something, and Veronica was found to be the name of a holy woman who followed our Lord to Calvary, and who, while piously wiping the Redeemer's brow with a cloth, received as reward the miraculous imprint of his countenance. So the handkerchief of St. Veronica is pub-

licly worshiped in Rome upon State occasions, and the ceremony is performed with the utmost splendor. The prostrate multitude, the domed St. Peter's, dimly lighted by the torches in the nave, and the shadowy baldachino, hanging to all appearance in midair, form a spectacle not easily forgotten.

And yet one sees so many such scenes in Rome, where the Church feeds the ignorant imagination of the people, setting up gross imitations of all kinds of idolatry, that wonder almost ceases in the gullibility of the people, where every care has been taken for centuries to cultivate in them an educated ignorance.

OFFICES AND CUSTOMS OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH

THE general oversight of the Church or the duties of universal episcopacy were shared everywhere alike by the twelve apostles on their execution of the command of going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature. After their generation those who came next in high charge changed the itinerary plan, and individuals settled in large cities, each taking the distinct title of bishop, as Mark in Alexandria, Titus in Crete, and Timothy in Ephesus. The title of Father in God was applied to bishops in general, in the word papa, or pope. It was not until the end of the sixth century that the idea of one universal bishop, or papa, was perpetrated by the Bishop of Constantinople, Cyriacus. For this he was severely criti-

cised by his Christian brother, Gregory, Bishop of Rome. Every one should know the final protest of the estimable and humble Gregory, for he said, "I tell you confidently, that whoever styles himself, or wishes to be styled, universal priest, does in his self-exaltation anticipate Anti-christ, setting up himself in pride above his fellows." Later the office of the Bishop of Rome was increased in jurisdiction throughout Southern Italy, and the occupant of that chair came to be universally thought of as the most influential prelate in the West. The successors of Gregory grasped after the tempting fruit of universal episcopacy, so that finally the Church of Rome succeeded in establishing her bishops as the supreme head, or papa, of others. The Church of the Catacombs at Rome never thought of thus outranking her neighbors, and the later supremacy became one of the many astonishing innovations the Roman Church has forced, one after another.

Church history tells us that "the bishops of Rome were all buried in the Catacombs till the time of Leo I, who died in 462. He was interred in the vestibule of the sacristy of St. Peter's. From this time we may trace the decline of the subterranean cemeteries in public estimation. During the troubles that followed, most of their entrances and windings seem to have been lost, excepting a few branches of easy access which remained open, and were still embellished with ornaments suggested by a debased taste."

The bishop being the highest officer in the Church, with the exception of a few of them, who came to be classed as archbishops, we find the following subordinate officers: deacons and sub-deacons, presbyters, acolytes or waiters, exorcists, lectors, and doorkeepers. Inscriptions of epitaphs to presbyters, lectors, and their wives have been found; also to other officers, clergymen and their wives and daughters. Many women

in the Church took upon themselves a peculiar office, that of consecration. It was taken by women vowed to remain unmarried, and by those widows vowed not to remarry. Several inscriptions speak of them; one cemented in the Vatican library wall reads, "To Octavia, a widow, matron of God."

In the early Church thousands of persons, of both sexes, devoted themselves to serving God in singleness of life, and thousands lived up to their high standard in all trueness of heart, and the Church boasted of them as her necklace of jewels. In the pagan worship at that time were six vestal virgins, as a parallel to the Church's tens of thousands.

Then gradually the original purpose of celibacy became thwarted, and it was looked upon as a species of self-sacrifice, by means of which one could obtain eternal life and glory, and then was brought about the forced celibacy of the clergy, in direct con-

tradiction to St. Paul, when he wrote, "Let the brethren be husband of one wife." The celibacy of the clergy only has existed but to bring down shame and scandal upon the Church. Letters of some of the monks who amused themselves with silly women dare not be published in their mass of indecency, and one great branch of the Christian Church to-day is hampered by its foolish rule of celibacy, an unnatural life followed by natural immoral practices, as to exhibit a great blot upon the high standard of Christian living. In the early years of this dangerous system Jerome gave a warning which the disciple of to-day might do well to emulate. "It were better to have walked in lowly paths," he wrote, "to have submitted to marriage, than, attempting a higher ascent, to fall into the depths of hell."

Another scandal, which in the early Church was the purest love-feast, grew up in that feast of Christendom called the

Agape, distinct from the Lord's Supper. Each succeeding century brought some worse change in the original love-feast. Pagans turning Christian who had been accustomed to reveling before their idols, were permitted to have this part of their weakness favored, that they might celebrate days in similar luxury, though not with such impiety. Thus the simple religious feast as pictured in the Catacombs, painted in fresco on their walls, where Peace and Love are represented to abide, degenerated into drunken revels held every day and far into the night. Paulinnus, Bishop of Nola, expresses his grief at this, had Scriptural subjects painted over the whole of his church to edify the ignorant people, whence we see one purpose of Christian art, and he expresses himself thus, in excusing their ignorance: "How I wish," he said, "that their joys would assume a more sober character! that they would not mix their cups on holy ground! Yet I think we must

be too severe upon the pleasures of their little feasts: for error creeps into unlearned minds; and their simplicity, unconscious of the great fault they commit, verges on piety, supposing that the saints are gratified by the wine poured on their tombs." They would meet secretly to celebrate the feast of the Lord's Supper and the "Agapæ," and this brought them under ban of an edict then issued against all fraternities. The authorities believed these sessions to be "hotbeds of sedition, plots, and conspiracies." One hundred and eighty-six years before Christ the Romans had with difficulty abolished that horrible feast of wine and revelry, the detested Bacchanalian, and now some supposed the Agape of the Christians to be a revival of those orgies. This is confirmed in the fact that, being brought on trial before Pliny, they were very careful to assure him of the strict morality of the Lord's Supper, and then "Pliny states their only fault to have been that in meeting on a

stated day before daylight, to engage in responsive worship to Christ as to a God, to bind themselves by oath (sacramentum), to abstain from all wickedness, that they did not commit any fraud, theft, or adultery—did not break faith or betray a trust; and then, after a brief separation, to reassemble and eat a harmless meal together." Finally the degeneration into such revelry became entirely omitted from forms of Christian worship, and the Agape lives only as a thing of history.

The origin of the mass is simple and interesting. It grew from the custom of dismissing from service those unbaptized, and unbelievers, who were permitted to have the Scriptures and the sermon, but not take communion; hence their dismissal with the words, *Ite, missa est*—Depart; it is the dismissal. This sending out was designated as *missio,* then *missa,* and finally our translation into "mass." The dismissal afterwards gave its name to the entire service,

and we call it the mass, also held for the baptized as well.

And how were the baptized taken through the ceremony of baptism? Were they taken to a river and immersed, as some think our Lord was done? Or how did those first Christians, who had it inaugurated with them by the disciples, conduct that rite? As one should naturally suppose, this custom, which must needs be secret, as all others, was performed below ground in those subterranean chapels of the Catacombs, where many baptismal fonts have been discovered. Here infants as well as adults were given that sacred privilege, one inscription reading: "The title of Candidus, the neophyte, who lived twenty-one months; buried on the nones of September." In the year 253 there was a discussion on infant baptism, as to "whether the rite should be deferred till the eighth day of the infant's life or administered at an earlier period." Gradually the ceremonies of baptism were

elaborated until each new sect chose its own code.

The custom of using lamps, or lights, in worship was necessary in the Catacombs, owing to their natural darkness. It was, however, a pagan custom, and the Christians of the first three centuries universally reprobated it.

The using of candles in midday in worship above ground was looked upon by them as essentially pagan and a sign of folly. It was thus specified among the idolatrous rites of the Theodosian code: "Let no one, in any kind of place whatsoever, in any city, burn lights, offer incense, or hang up garlands to senseless idols."

In reference to the using of lights in divine service, Vigilantius exclaims: "We almost see the ceremonial of the Gentiles introduced into the Churches under pretense of religion: piles of candles lighted while the sun is still shining; and everywhere people kissing and worshiping I know not

what; a little dust in a great vessel wrapped up in a precious cloth. Great honor do such persons render to the blessed martyrs, thinking with miserable tapers to illumine those whom the Lamb, in the midst of the throne, shines upon with the splendor of His majesty." It was latter-day Christians who, irrespective of opinions of early simplicity, changed to that of the many-tapered altar, with its twinkling lights and smoking incense. It was in the fourth century that the more simple forms of worship seem to have been lost sight of, while distinct changes and strange innovations began to get firm footing.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN ART

WHEN that small world grouped around about the Mediterranean Sea was already filled with beautiful creations spoken of as "art;" when Greece, long before the siege of Troy, had put forth what a larger, older world has never since been able to attain; when Egypt centuries before had built giant temples and painted history on their huge surface; when all the petty kingdoms of greater Assyria had erected, carved, and colored; when back in the dim æons there was lifted up a mighty tower, and Babel expressed the same groping for such activity; when far to the eastward the rich unknown Orient coined artistic forms she has never since abandoned; when away again to the north and west sturdy Gauls,

Saxons, and Celts were crudely shaping ideas showing what revolutions of relation lay between Stonehenge and Karnak; when Vikings, too, were scholars of Beauty, prompted by that of the midnight sun, and were cruising down far distant shores in lands filled with the art of the Indian, the Aztec, and the aborigines; when only nineteen hundred years ago Rome was just entering her decline from all that glory of state which still confounds the world, and the land of Italy was filled with art second only to that of Greece; when—to phrase it all—the indomitable spirit has been and will be forever striving to perfect what it knows to be Art, as it strives to hold out what it knows to be a religion, for Art and Religion are inseparably bound together,—when this is and shall always be the repetition of history—then we can fall back upon it and say that with the advent of Christianity there must have been inherent in those early Christians the same outward

striving to express ART, the same æsthetic nature of all that is human, that spirit innate in the breasts of all mankind.

"Art," in the words of that great Russian philosopher, is but "human activity" with a special purpose—"the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which men have risen. Thus, then, all human life is filled with works of art of every kind, from cradle song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, church services, monuments, and triumphal processions." Art and Religion are related in this manner that "Art's vital element is interwoven with man's perception, and that perception rests on the basis of what we consider to be *good* or *evil*— and what is good and what is evil is defined by what are termed *religions.*"

Man's highest comprehension of life is embodied in the creed of his religion, and the strength of this religious conception stamps the value of the feeling or the senti-

ment in his art. It has been often claimed that early Christianity discouraged art. It could not have done so in the nature of its true philosophy. It is true that art was cramped during that early religious period; in fact, it was so for twelve centuries, until that dark winter ended in the Renaissance, earth's most glorious spring, and then the Christian religion gave us the most sublime specimens of art; for who can paint another "Sistine Chapel," or a "Transfiguration?" or who can carve another image of the world's greatest general, such a "Moses," as he?

The relation of Christianity to art in the first few centuries was not one of an indifferent or even a hostile nature, as many writers have claimed. The large percentage of Jewish converts among early Christians should call to mind one or two strong facts—the Jew or Semitic imagination differed with peculiarity from that of the Greek or Gentile. And Jews and Greeks

held diverse opinions as to the nature of God. The Jews will always be Jews as something apart from others, and they will remain a people peculiar unto themselves. We are reminded that the Semitic mind could fly to such daring heights, most wild and restless, and almost with a "nervous impetuosity" they talked and wrote of the most sublime things. On the other hand, certain canons of sculpture, painting, and architecture will always remain fixed, and these the Semite would not or could not observe. Again, if he would try to represent his idea of God, it would not be such an easy matter as for the Greek. The Jew did not believe in pulling down Deity to a level with the human. Their majestic ideas of One whom "the heaven and the heaven of heavens can not contain"—"the immortal, *invisible,* only wise God"—made such a representation of Jehovah as inconceivable. Thus, then, since Art soars highest as the interpreter of religion, it was not for the

"Such a Moses as he!"

subjective mind of the Semite to give us that high art; and, moreover, the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," certainly made them fear works of an idolatrous nature.

Quite another side to the drawback of early Christian art was that of the strong pagan environment, that it would seem impossible to create a new school. Early Christian sculpture and painting show the similarity to heathen types, and the Christian fathers were chary of their use. The Gentile element was fast coming in; Paul and Barnabas had said, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles," so that scarce a century and a half had passed, we are told, "when the Jewish element had disappeared." We can readily detect that pagan forms were fast appropriated; and after what comes first in the history of any art, the adornment of dress, and the decoration of furniture and wall spaces, we have the next natural step, the decoration of tombs and wall spaces in

burial places—and deep in the recesses of the Catacombs the remains, as seen to-day, show that the early Christians loved art as all men love it, and that they strove to the best of their ability to develop it. Christianity began to take its own subject; Old Testament scenes were largely drawn on and portrayed with originality and force; there is balance and harmony, and a spiritual depth is reached which declares a meaning quite different from any beauty found in pagan paintings. It has not taken close students to point out how "these frescoes are invaluable indexes of the belief and the life of the infant Church. They show that the early Christians were animated by a religion of cheerfulness and hopefulness."

Above all else, it is in this art springing from this religion that our chief interest in the Catacombs lies. The casual observer detects no beauty in those representations, but there is an underlying principle there of far more importance than that which is ar-

tistic. We must not think that the "fathers of the faith" looked upon the so-called beauty as seen in the pagan art of the period without holy horror; for it was only time that could make them less austere, so that after a long period of toleration they could countenance artistic beauty with pleasure. It has already been pointed out to us that "the Christians of the fourth century saw that they must be reconciled with the world before they could fully conquer it. They resolved, like Paul, to be 'all things to all men,' and they judged for themselves when it was expedient to give a new direction to the dying arts of paganism."

But wherefore was the reason for all this unique cycle of Christian paintings? It was a reason many and varied. A most eminent authority reminds us that "it was not a matter of choice that early Christianity at Rome and elsewhere spent so much labor in the construction and adornment of the Catacombs. It was a necessity of the

most imperative kind. It was the earnest, constant, persevering faith against paganism and Judaism on the one hand, and heresy and Gnosticism on the other, that made all this vast work necessary. From time to time Christianity was persecuted because it was not understood, and the effort was early made to corrupt it. Two evils, then, had to be guarded against, and in nothing is the wise and patient spirit of our fathers of the faith more evinced than in the plan they adopted to avoid those evils. They would record the faith in sculpture, painting, and funeral tablets, and in such a way that all competent Christians could read it and no pagan spies or false brethren could portray it. Martyrdom itself is not more explicit in its testimony of the zeal and earnestness for the faith than in that painstaking, artistic labor which in times of persecution strove to express and record it in these monuments. For the Christian artist must work at great disadvantage, far

underground, by the dim light of lanterns and torches; not for mere fame or wealth, but simply and solely to express the faith of the community to which he belonged; fundamental truth was the aim of it all, as Christ and His apostles taught it. In the light of these monuments we read confirmations of the teaching of the Christian writers of the first four centuries; and the pagan writers, from Pliny to Julian the Apostate, show us the necessity of their existence and the nature of the contest."

Thus, then, Christian art, which art was destined to grow into the strongest and best, had its birth in the tomb. Its decorative vines, figures, and scenes seem to be the shroud of that tomb's impenetrable mysteries; and not until there comes the realization that it is all one vast symbolism, that every concept evolved from the painter's brush is a symbol to reveal a special teaching of the truth, is it all plain, and it centers within itself an interest far exceeding

that of any in the world's use of symbolical meanings.

Symbolism.

A symbol is a sign revealing a hidden meaning. Some idea, some truth is by it expressed in a visible form. A picture of a ship stands for the mere idea of a ship, or the picture could again be used symbolically, with a word description, as in Longfellow's poem, "The Ship of State." Both picture and words are symbols for ideas.

From the earliest ages man has used symbolism—generally that of teaching ideas by means of pictures. Pictures took the place of inadequate language, or taught ideas to illiterates, who were not able to read language. To those educated in the use of symbols they do not appeal as a veil of mysteries, but rather as the revelation of a truth. As education and intelligence advances, symbols to express a truth or a doctrine become less necessary. A symbol,

unlike allegory, is simple, and may be read or interpreted by a glance. An all-wise Father first employed symbols in revealing divine truths to man, then paganism adopted the custom and veiled their dogmas in signs and symbols.

But nowhere in history were such resources resorted to as in the advent of the Christian religion. Many circumstances made this necessary—the great mass of common people could only be taught divine truths in this way; a picture would tell them everything, when once explained, where mere words would become incomprehensible. Again, symbols, signs, and watchwords could be used by Christians to discriminate true disciples from would-be impostors; thus sprang up the large custom of drawing a fish to represent Christ, whose use served to identify others of the faith. St. Paul tells of certain circumcised Jews, who, for the sake of gain and their own belly, named themselves as true disciples.

Hence arose one great symbol to distinguish true from false—the CREED—"the faith of the Church," re-established after Christ by Paul as the standard of Christian truth, not written, but learned by heart, and set upon the lips as a watchword.

To perpetuate this symbol of the creed, to preach it to converts, pictures and inscriptions were everywhere employed as multiple symbols of its many parts, and these early Christian teachings were piled up most profusely in those subterranean labyrinths of the Catacombs. There those "symbols and inscriptions beam with radiant joy amid the gloom of death." It is this that makes the frescoed paintings on the walls of the Catacombs comprise the chief interest of the cemeteries. Natural instinct wrought out the decorated wall spaces of palaces and temples, and the walls of the tombs received their share from the painter's brush.

What should a Christian find suitable for such a purpose? The intaglios of Kar-

nak, the outlines of the Parthenaic friezes? Only such style could be adopted in so far as it told of history in Biblical story, and the pictured Bible became the only need of giving the book to the people; for where was the Book except in treasured manuscripts? and how many of the people could read if they possessed it? But the picture story could be read by all the untutored masses, and the divine truth involved in these painted symbols could thus easily be interpreted and applied as a sermon. Nearly the whole of the Old Testament cycle is there, supplemented by many scenes from the New, for the support and inspiration of that early faith. Whether the Christian artist could draw the proper lines of the human body, or give the proper cast to a countenance, or get the perspective of a scene, made little difference. He knew as much of the canons of his art as did any other painter of his day, and he hesitated at nothing. Christian scruples, bred by the

idolatrous nature of pagan art, being once overcome, there remained for the Christian artist but to repeat the fixed types once established. Yet pagan art had its influence, gradually allying itself with that of the Christian, and its treachery of innovation is strongly proved when the Pantheon of Rome, devoted with its art to Jupiter and all the gods, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

In catacomb frescoes the small things of nature are everywhere about. In those of St. Pretextatus the vault of the chapel is elaborately divided into four bands of wreaths: one of roses, another of corn sheaves, a third of vine leaves and grapes; in all birds are introduced, feeding their young in the nest; and above all are the leaves of the laurel or baytree, each wreath severally representing the four seasons. Since winter indicated death, and the laurel victory, we have here been taught the new Christian idea of a blessed immortality.

The Cross.

Purposeful it may seem, true it is that one of the most frequent and common signs seen everywhere in nature, engraved in the works of men, found alike in the stars and in the snowy crystals, meeting us in the minute things of daily life, always in nature and art, and the one chosen by the Father as the symbol of our great redemption—is the sign of the cross.

Centuries before the crucifixion of our Lord the cross was used as a sacred symbol by heathen nations widely separated geographically. Strange truth it may seem, but the use of the cross in pre-Christian heathenism referred either to the curse brought into the world by the fruit of the tree of knowledge or to that which would remove the curse, even the fruit of the tree of life, "the wood whereby righteousness cometh;" and thus it was always used either as the symbol of blessing, life, resurrection, immortality, or that of punishment and a

curse, and punishment on the cross was known to all the ancient world.

That the world principle of the cross has been dominant from earliest civilization is seen in every discovery in all quarters of the globe. Tradition has it that the mark that Cain received was the old (T) *Tau* Cross. Ancient Egypt used the cross with a handle (☥) as the emblem of life, and it was seen in their paintings. Among the sculptures from Khorsabad, the ivories from Nimrod, is found the same "similar cross," and the Copts, the Persians, the Indians (for the hooked cross is seen on as many objects of the north as it is found in the Vedaic religion, be they Indian tribes of Arctic region or those of Hudson Bay territory), all had their "similar cross." The "tree of life" was worshiped by the Mexicans and other nations of Central America. The Scandinavians had great reverence for it, and we find ornaments decorated with the cross in their cemeteries and in the ancient

Saxon cemeteries of Kent. The Druids selected the most beautiful forest tree, stripped all branches but two of special size, and performed their ceremonies under the shadow of the cross, and marked the bark of all their sacred trees with the *Tau* sign. In the unearthed remains of Troy, Mycenæ, and at Cyprus we find the world-wide cross.

If in some form the ancient pre-Christian, pre-historic man of all the world, had some revelation as to the emblem of the cross, it remained for the Holy Scriptures to vindicate the truth of the one great Sacrifice stretched out on that sacred tree. So in the Old Testament we have the cross prefigured in many types. There is the true revelation as to the Tree of Life and its prefigurement of the Cross, "whereon our Blessed Lord lifted up His hands as an evening sacrifice." We are indebted to Langhorne for pointing out these Old Testament signs of the cross, in material, in form, and in action. In material we see

Jacob's ladder as the cross, by means of which alone man can ascend to heaven; in the tree which sweetened the bitter waters of Marah, foreshadowing the cross which sweetened the poisoned and bitter waters of this world; in the rich grape cluster borne by the two spies. In form, we have the wood of the sacrifice borne across Isaac's shoulders and whereon he was laid, and in later ages our Lord, the true Isaac, was to bear His cross up that selfsame hill. The brazen serpent was lifted up on the cross-shaped pole, as the source of life and healing. "As Moses uplifted the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." Then we have the Paschal Lamb pierced and roasted on a transverse spit, or cross. In action, there is that act of Jacob's in crossing his hands when he blessed the two sons of Joseph, "guiding his hands wittingly," and thus speaking of that cross which brings life and peace and blessing; the arms of Moses outstretched

"Where Cecelia lay, on a level with the floor," and representation of "Orontes."

until the going down of the sun, while Israel prevailed in battle.

And so it appears of divine intention that the Christian, from apostolic times, should have adopted the cross as his most sacred symbol, the outward sign and profession of his faith. They prayed with outstretched arms, and did not speak nor sit, nor rise to walk, nor put on shoes, nor sit at table, nor go to battle, nor retire without making the sign of the cross. This passed on to public worship, and finally, what more could later disciples do than to build their cathedral churches in the form of the cross!

Thus in the paintings on the walls of the Catacombs one of the commonest representations is of persons with uplifted hands, in the act of prayer, called Orontes, and probably indicating the devout character of the departed.

The *Tau* (sometimes called the Egyptian) cross is found in the frescoes of St. Calixtus, and here it would probably not

have been made earlier than the third century.

There sprang up a special use for the sign of the cross. In the earliest inscriptions and monuments it became associated with the symbol recognized as the monogram of Christ, which monogram became frequent on burial monuments, ancient lamps, glass vessels, gems, and coins, and was afterwards adopted by Constantine as the sign on the shields and standards of his army. It is found in various forms, viz.: , the oldest and most common, and found in St. Calixtus; and others,

These are all universally conceded to be the initial letters of the name of Christ. The Church attached its deep significance as a conquering and all-prevailing name. The art of the Christians shows the change from the thought of humiliation and suffering to that of authority and power, and we find the monogram surrounded with

garlands, palm branches, and in places of honor and dominion. Thus can be traced the beginning of the opinion respecting the power and office of Christ which afterwards clothed Him with the attributes of the severe and awe-inspiring judge.

The tradition of finding the true cross by Helena, the mother of Constantine, has even less foundation than the vision of the cross by the emperor. This tradition of its discovery by Helena proved occasion for the most hurtful superstitions, which fostered the worship of relics and suggested the religious pilgrimages of following centuries, and hence the fruitless crusades.

"The Cross, resign it never;
The Cross, re-sign it ever."

Minor Symbols.

There are three kinds of symbols to be found in the Catacombs, exclusive of those supposed to belong to martyrdom; the first

and by far the largest proportion of them refer to the Christian faith; the second, purely secular, indicate the trades of the deceased, found so often on the grave, or locula; while the third merely represent proper names.

One becomes surprised at the multiplicity of the symbols employed by those early Christians, and it can only be possible in these limited pages to speak of a few.

A most common sight was to see some person, probably of the most humble walks of life, engaged for a moment in drawing a fish. This might be with a stick in the soft earth, or on a bit of stone; and should any one be near who understood the sign, there would spring up a bond between the two, or among several, as with strange men belonging to the same order and meeting to-day. In the Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ *ichthus,* each Greek character represents the initial letter in the Greek sentence, "Jesus

Christ, Son of God, Savior." What more could be wished in a mystic word or sign? When the actual fish was used, its meaning was entirely concealed from the uninitiated, who made it a subject of derision and stumbling on their part. Another appropriateness was given it. "The fish," observed Tertullian, "seems a fit emblem of Him whose spiritual children are like the offspring of fishes, born in the waters of baptism." (This does not indicate the practice of immersion, which was not used then.) A secondary reference has been made to the parable of the net. The emblematic power of the fish is stronger than the symbolic; emblematic of the figure of Christ in His divine presence and power, in that saving ordinance of holy baptism and of the holy communion. In the Talmud the Messiah is called "Dag;" *i. e.,* fish. The Jews had prophetically connected His advent with the time of conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constel-

lation of fishes; and Tirschmuth remarks on the madness, infatuation, and obstinacy of the Jews, that when that conjunction actually took place they rejected Him.

The dove signifies peace with God; it often carries the olive branch either in beak or claws.

The anchor is understood to signify the close of a well-spent life; the conclusion of a successful voyage, when the anchor is cast.

A ship sailing was the Church, or a Christian voyaging heavenward. Peter referred to the successful entrance of a vessel at port when he said, "So shall an entrance be ministered to you abundantly."

Actors' masks on sarcophagi show us that the ancient world was familiar with the idea of "all the world 's a stage." An elegant pagan inscription has this: "While I lived, I lived well. My drama is now ended, soon yours will be; farewell, and applaud me."

The peacock, as an emblem of immor-

tality, was another idea borrowed from the pagans. The phœnix was also adopted for this purpose by the Christians.

Sheep and lambs represent disciples, often, on mural paintings of catacombs; sometimes cared for by the Good Shepherd, who leads them into green pastures, sometimes around Him in attitude of earnest attention to hear the Master's teaching.

The palm tree and branch, frequent on burial monuments, with primary reference to Rev. vii, 9, stand for triumph over death.

The rod, signifying divine power, appears in the hands of three persons, and three only: Christ, Moses, and Peter. Wm. Palmer gives a splendid interpretation of the rod. He refers us to the psalm, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy power out of Zion." He says, "The rod of Moses is the power of Christ, delegated to His servant; the rock struck is Christ Himself, and what Moses did in the wilderness for the old Israel, Peter does for the new." So in

the Christian paintings and sculptures, Moses striking the rock commonly represents Peter. In the catacombs of Nereus and Achilles we see Christ with the rod touching the basket of natural meal to change it to spiritual. The spiritual application of the miracle was well known.

The symbols of trade figured on gravestones and were long regarded by antiquarians as the instruments of martyrdom by which the deceased suffered death. But such a mass of horrors as these would indicate and the combination of objects belonging to the same trade should have contradicted the superstition. We find pictured knives and mallets, adzes and saws; implements of the wool gatherer, as shears, combs, etc., found on the tombstones of Adeodatus, now in the lapidarian gallery, and many others.

Animals were often employed—the dragon, the ass, the pig, and the lion—signifying the meaning in the names; as, for

instance, above the drawing of a stiff little pig we have:

Porcella hic dormit
In P. Quixit ann. III M. X
D. XIII.

(Here sleeps Porcella in peace. She lived three years, ten months, and thirteen days.)

That the pictures on the walls of the Catacombs were painted with a view of inculcating Christian doctrines and teaching Bible history, and not merely for decoration, seems the only philosophical view to take of it, although there is a school of believers for each of these views. The clergy have been called the real artists in their exploiting a subject, while the executioners were mere artists. The figures, dress, and adornments are not widely different from prevailing pagan style; not only these appear similar, but there were many pagan art subjects put to use by the Christians, and their symbols were not unlike. Several great critics point out the fact that it is as

unhistorical to sunder the symbols of early Christian funeral monuments from the contemporary heathen burial monuments as to sunder the whole cycle of Christian art, the entire Christian civilization, even the very origin of Christianity, from its connection with the intellectual, æsthetic, and moral development of the non-Christian world; hence the relation seen in such illustrations as that of Christ as the Good Shepherd, of Orpheus, and of Mercury.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding this close alliance of Christian and heathen art, the Christian had entirely an unique cycle of subject and thought, and there is to be seen in them a "spiritual depth to be distinguished from the superficial beauty of pagan art." Old Testament subjects were as popular as the New, beginning with earliest Biblical history, as the offering of Isaac in sacrifice by Abraham, each is clad in a simple tunic, praying with uplifted hands. Isaac and the lamb which stands near sig-

nify the Lamb of God, Son of the Father, whose sacrifice is the propitiation for sin. The fagot of wood for the burnt offering is also seen.

About the most interesting scene of Old Testament narratives is that of the Prophet Jonah, about 115 years before Christ and 750 after Jonah; Apollodorus alluded to a story invented long after that of the prophet's; the tale of Andromeda bound to a rock in reach of a sea monster. Fable has it that this occurred at Joppa. Pliny tells of the bones of a monster brought to Rome from Joppa, the skeleton measuring forty feet in length, having a spine one and one-half foot thick, and ribs larger than those of an elephant. Such evidence is remarkable, and the fact stands that the history of Jonah was the most popular of all in the ancient Church and the most frequently represented in the Catacombs, presumably because it was viewed as the type of our Savior's death and resurrection. The idea of the resur-

rection with them, as with all Christians, was the dearest to their hearts, even all the more impressive with them, spending so many gloomy hours in the presence of the dead, where only a slab separated the living from the dead.

Jonah escaping from the whale (of death) and reclining beneath the gourd (heaven), is everywhere seen scratched upon the walls and afterwards sculptured on sarcophagi. In one composition from a tomb in the cemetery of St. Priscilla we see at the top a painting of Christ raising Lazarus, which was only another sign of a general resurrection. Below we see to the right the ship from which Jonah is being cast out; in the middle, a latticed arbor thickly covered by the leaves of the gourd, with Jonah under it, signifying the refreshment of the souls in paradise. Lastly, in the left corner we see him issuing from the monster's jaws, for the resurrection. This, we see, is not the order of parts as in Bible his-

tory, and the change has been made to illustrate the Christian: first, scorched by the fire of persecution; refreshed, may be, by a temporary intermission, and at last cast out of the ship by martyrdom, finally coming out of the jaws of the monster by resurrection. As regards the form of the monster, we need no archæologist to tell us that "it was borrowed from the heathen house painters of Rome. Hell and death are represented by the form of a dragon with open jaws, from early ages downward. In the Greek ritual the fish of Jonah is called the wild beast, or sea monster, and of any form at all resembling that of a whale there is no trace."

Quite another as striking and frequent representation is that of Noah and the ark. The myth of Ducalion was a familiar one to Roman minds; it had been copied by the pagans from the history of Noah, was parallel to the divine truth, and had been represented in pagan decorations. So the early

Christian artist borrowed its lines in sculpture and painting, and its truth took a powerful hold on Christian minds. And what is the picture we so frequently find? Notwithstanding the facts in the Biblical narrative, we find "the ark a mere box provided with lid and lock: the family of the patriarch reduced to a single figure, and the animals altogether omitted. In all the painted copies these absurdities are stereotyped." Sometimes the artist, in an attempt to escape the charge of copying, varies his picture by changing the attitude of Noah in the box and his manner of receiving the dove.

Other subjects, as God preserving His people, were conspicuously displayed. They pictured Daniel safe before two harmless lions, and made no representations of their brothers and sisters being destroyed by the rapacious beasts in the Coliseum. They tried to paint the three Hebrews in

the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, the artist struggling with the terrible difficulty of the nude; but the victims of Neronian cruelty, wrapped in pitch-cloth and used as torches to illuminate the circus, were never delineated. Both the subjects of Daniel and of the Hebrew children are elaborated in the catacombs of St. Agnese. Above the two is centralized the figure of Christ, with two sheep at His feet, who as the "Shepherd and King of martyrs has drunk deeper than all the cup of suffering, and is able both to strengthen and reward those who do suffer; and the two sheep at His feet are the two apostles as martyrs, and in them all others." O, the inspiration of deepest truth to be found in such hieratic symbols!

Next to the rite of baptism that of the mystical Supper of the Eucharist was the most sacred to the new believers, and such a feast we find often upon the walls. In the frescoes from St. Calixtus we have the

"chamber of sacraments," where in a central group are seven men, disciples of Christ, seven signifying universality and acting as a reminder of Galilean shores, to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection and invited them to dine on bread and broiled fish. The seven are seated at the table, with two fishes upon it, and seven baskets of loaves arranged below, reminding them of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. On the left of this is a three-legged table having on it bread and fish. A woman is at one side, in the attitude of prayer; a man, opposite, clad in the pallium, is extending his hands, especially the right, toward the table as if to force the idea of consecration.

The woman praying has been interpreted as representing the Church, in the prevalent idea that those prayers are most acceptable when made with the consecrated gifts lying in open view. Such ingenuity,

yet simplicity, of design is to be appreciated. The third scene, the sacrifice by Abraham, shows the idea of the supreme sacrifice already exploited.

In 1865 De Rossi discovered what was then a new part of the cemetery of St. Domatilla. Through a vestibule of severest classic style the visitor passes along a broad entrance, somewhat inclined, from which small chambers and side passages extend right and left. The ceilings contain paintings, which, for simplicity and naturalness, point to an origin prior to the decadence of Roman art. De Rossi places them at the time of Domatilla, the close of the first century. On the wall is a portion of a mutilated fresco, two persons sitting on a couch, before them a table with three loaves and a fish. This is a scene from the every-day life of the two buried in the chamber. Several such scenes are more or less conspicuous.

The Chief Representation of Christ.

The most beautiful idea permeating civilization, the idea of the Son of God as Divine Love coming to the earth, harmonizing all forces, revealing the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, and gathering all people into one flock under a tender Shepherd's care—this idea is carried out in the juxtaposition of such words as Hindoos, Krishna, Greeks, Romans, Apollo, Orpheus, Hebrews, David, Christians, and Christ. There is no more beautiful thought than the relation of Shepherd and flock; and when Christ uttered these words, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep," He is to be understood as summing up in Himself all the pagan and Jewish prophecies respecting that divine office.

Early Christian art was very slow and cautious in representing the divinity of our Lord in any human form, and all drawings were only of an ideal, never an actual por-

trait. There is no such a thing as a true portrait of the Savior. For the first four centuries the Church preserved a traditional likeness of the Lord and of Sts. Peter and Paul, and this may account for the similarity found in the representations of the former, which are generally of two types: one a beardless youth full of force and freshness, which representation is usually connected with His miracles, as in the multiplication of loaves, the raising of Lazarus. The second type is bearded, more severe, with long, flowing hair; similar to this was the supposed earliest professed portrait of our Lord extant, which was found in a chapel in the cemetery of St. Calixtus and considered as belonging to the end of the fourth century. The Church of Rome has perpetrated many fables regarding portraits of Christ as well as those of His mother, who, in spite of the effort to trace the worship of her back to the earliest times, is not to be found in writings, paintings,

nor sculptures till late in the fourth century, except when she appears merely as an accessory to the Divine Infant or in the Holy Family. Probably the oldest fresco of her is in St. Priscilla, of the first or early second century. She is early portrayed also with the Child in St. Domatilla and St. Agnese. The stupendous impiety of the actual worship of her comes later, when in the miserable change that passed over the spirit of Christendom, when social relations were so depreciated that anything honorable was held in contempt, and woman was treated as a being of inferior holiness; then it was that the worship of such a being as the Virgin Mary came as a mighty balm, as a new religion, strange and sweet, and the error of her worship took such root that its actual blasphemy will remain with us a long time to come.

So we must understand that all representations of Christ as the Good Shepherd are merely symbolical of His office, and none

produce any lineaments of a true likeness. And the symbol was not new with the Christians, for they were familiar with the Ram bearing Mercury, and the Satyr bearing a goat or sheep on his shoulders. The sheep and shepherd idea was very common among the most ancient people, and so with the Christians, in that we often meet the Good Shepherd in the Roman Catacombs. Here we have Him grave and sober, coming from afar with His staff and the lost sheep. Again, we have Him in a dancing, joyous attitude; and again we have Him, or Apollo, bearing a goat, and Mercury with a ram; the one as a typical bearer-away of sin, disease, and death, for the similar office of Orpheus, found in the well-known octagon picture in the Catacombs. We find Him always with His lyre, of which it had been said that "it is one powerful instrument to produce peace and harmony amid the tumultuous passions of the soul itself, as well as among the turbulent and savage

natures, clashing interests, rival ambitions, and differences of opinion, religious and political. It is not the music of the lyre which does this, but that which the lyre symbolizes: the love of God and our neighbors; practicing no injustice, but to make music and gladness along the highway of nations."

The Beautiful Symbol of the Vine.

In the oldest catacombs of them all, St. Domatilla, of the first century, which give the evidence of St. John's Gospel, virtually proving not only the existence of its author, but also "the Author and Finisher" of St. John's faith, we have as frequent and common that most significant of symbols, the painted grape-vine. And we know that the first act of the Master's hand was at Cana, of Galilee, in striking the true note of Christianity when He turned the insipid water of earth into the wine of heaven. The symbol of the vine so contin-

ually employed by the Christians is found in many catacomb frescoes. It is sometimes entwined gracefully about with flitting birds among its branches, and rich, ripe fruit encircles the wall spaces.

There have been many beautiful things said about the symbolical vine, and we can do no more than quote the interpretations of learned scholars. As the vine drinks in the dews of heaven and sucks up the earth's moisture, and transfers these by aid of the sunlight and heat into purple clusters of luscious fruit that can be pressed into nourishing wine, so the Divine Logos, or Son of God, through His incarnation absorbs, transforms, and recreates all human and earthly things, turning our sorrows into joys, our discord into harmony, our strife into peace, our sin into holiness, our world itself into heaven. It was this quality of the vine, doubtless, that prompted the similitude of Christ when He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

One authority, who has paid special attention to the subject, has said: "The vine has been in all ages regarded as the natural emblem of wisdom; *sophia,* the Greek word for wisdom, meaning originally the juice of the grape; hence the fruit of the vine represents intellectual fruit, the practical result of the understanding."

"Christ is the wisdom of God unto salvation as self-existent and self-sustained in the bosom of the Father before even the earth was. His best type is the palm tree; but as incarnate for our redemption and as Son of man, He is the vine clinging round the Father's neck for support in the sense that He is the real or true vine of God's planting, yielding fruit to His glory; our poor, imperfect humanity is not like that true vine: it yields only sour grapes, and must be grafted into the true vine to be improved. It is, therefore, in this double sense of divine wisdom and perfect humanity that Christ is likened to the vine by St. John,

and it is precisely in this double sense that early Christian art used the vine as a figure of our Lord and Savior."

Some went so far as to associate the idea of the drunkenness of Noah with the passion of Christ, who asked that the cup might pass from Him. The nakedness of Noah representing the weakness of Christ in His sufferings, as the apostle says, "He was crucified through weakness;" wherefore the same apostle says, "The weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

And so Christ "would drink anew wine with His disciples in His Father's kingdom," as emblematic of the joys to be had there forever. No wonder, then, the primitive Church in the days of her oppression and sadness rejoiced in the weekly celebration of the Agape and the Eucharist, and painted and carved the vine in her places of worship. The wine of Christ's blood was medicine to her soul, which made

her forget her poverty and remember her misery no more. Christ, her Lord, had been trodden in the winepress of wrath, like the newly gathered clusters of the vintage, in order that His love might fill the cup of salvation for her, and our dry and parched lips. Every time the sacramental cup is tasted we remember the words, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman," as not only a reminder, but also as a pledge of all future joy and gladness; when earth shall be exchanged for heaven, and all its water turned into wine; when the whole Church, redeemed out of mankind as the bride of Christ, shall lift up her beaming chalice brimming over with bliss, and say to the Bridegroom, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

And so they sleep; for no unholy hands can disturb their repose. Who can count the aisles of numberless graves—some daring to say a thousand miles form the streets

"A strange, beautiful roadway."

of the city of the dead—who dare estimate the millions of souls but their Creator, with whom they are now chanting the eternal song, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now!" And so we let them lie—

"In Pace repositus."

While in our mortality we climb once more the ancient marble stairs, always sacred to their Christian feet, and emerge once more out on the Campagna—La Campagna di Roma—the music of the words—poets, historians, scientists, and travelers of every clime have vibrated with the rhythm, have sought to explore and explain the mystery, and still the rays of the Italian sun form a halo to crown an area of miracle; for without the walls of the Eternal City still stretch fields of Elysian lore, and within their lengthening space, where villas rose up, where marbles were torn from Nature's bowels and reset again, and yet again; there, where a strange, beautiful roadway

unfolded its miles of avenue; there, where life played its tragedies and comedies with emperors and slaves, all, on this magic carpet of this living green; and there, where Almighty Power, as if in contrast to that displayed by earth's petty rulers, chose to establish His monumental evidence; there —they sleep!

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